

Washington, DC – Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) testified Wednesday before the House Natural Resources Committee in support of a bill he introduced to create a task force to study and coordinate water efforts in the Southwest border region.

“One of the most pressing issues facing the small and rural communities of the Southwest region is the lack of adequate water and wastewater infrastructure systems, particularly in colonias,” Congressman Rodriguez said. “Sometimes conditions are so bad that residents must boil water before drinking it. This is a serious health concern.”

Congressman Rodriguez noted that although there are several agencies on the state and federal level that provide funding for water infrastructure programs, colonias are frequently left out or underfunded. H.R. 4719 will create a water task force comprised of seven federal agencies and relevant state agencies in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California.

“My bill, supported by the Texas Border delegation, will cut through bureaucratic red tape, ensure greater efficiency of federal and state resources and result in needy communities receiving adequate resources,” Congressman Rodriguez said. “Contrary to some perceptions, the bill will not tap into aquifers or distribute water to outside communities. It also will not create a water tax or user fee or require new programs or funding.”

A 2009 Government Accountability Office report found that state and federal efforts to address the significant water and wastewater needs along the border have been ineffective because of a lack of coordination and an inability to accurately assess the needs of communities within the border region.

“We’ve been working on colonia issues for 30 years,” said Reverend Doctor Ed Roden-Lucero, Co-Chair of EPISO (El Paso Interreligious Sponsoring Organization). “There are people who have been living in this situation, without water and wastewater, for 15 or 20 years. Whatever this legislation does to advance those families we think is very positive. We know Congressman Rodriguez is committed to that and we appreciate it.”

The full report – “Rural Water Infrastructure: Improved Coordination and Funding Processes

Could Enhance Federal Efforts to Meet Needs in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region” – can be found at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10126.pdf>.

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